

**Q:** Good afternoon. Today is November 2nd, 2017. My name is Sophia Cataldo, and I'm here with Patrick Conneely, "the Irish skipper." Today we are participating in the Newton Talks Oral History project that is being conducted with the Newton Free Library, Historic Newton, and the Newton Senior Center. What country are you originally from, and when--why did you leave your country?

**A:** I'm originally from Ireland, the island of Ireland. And I was born in Galway City in New Docks, and I immigrated to the United States October 30th, 1953.

**Q:** Can you tell us about your experience leaving your country?

**A:** Huh?

**Q:** Can you tell us about your experience leaving your country?

**A:** The harbor I left from was called the Harbor of Tears, because that's where all immigrants usually came from. Cork Harbor, the British called it Queenstown. And that's where the Titanic sailed from in 1912. And it was an emotional parting for me, but being a merchant mariner and a commercial fisherman, traveling was nothing new to me. World War II, most of our men and women--in 1939, Churchill declared war against the Nazis and most of our young men and women went into the British forces. The young people there had to take up the slack. If you came from a farming people you worked the farms; if you were seafaring, you worked on the trawlers. At ten years old I was working on a trawler with my dad, who was a skipper. There were dangerous waters because even though we maintained our neutral, in spite of Churchill threatening to blow us off the face of the earth, if we maintained our neutrality, our president who was born in New York, said to Mr. Churchill, "Before you start shooting into the Irish Republic, I advise you to look to your left and look to your right and see who's in your 8th Army, and remember the rebellion 1922, 1916." And Churchill backed off and we maintained our

neutrality, but know we had these -- have our own ships and we had to scurry around to the countries of the world to buy our own ships to keep the lifeline open to Ireland. But the fishing boats which I was on were on the top of the hit list for the U-boats. They didn't torpedo--they would use us as gun practice from a gun deck. They also mined the approaches to Ireland, and again they had the acoustic mines and they had the magnetic mines. The acoustic mines was the most dangerous because magnetic, you could see them. The acoustics you couldn't see them, and your engine would set off the mine under your vessel.

**Q:** How old were you when you left Ireland?

**A:** I was 21.

**Q:** Where did you live--where have you lived since leaving Ireland, besides Newton?

**A:** Besides Newton...When I was first married I lived in Dorchester and Jamaica Plain.

**Q:** How did you choose Newton?

**A:** Huh?

**Q:** How did you choose living in Newton overall?

**A:** The reason I came to Newton was I took a shore job and having a background with marine engines and boilers, I became super for The Home for Little Wanderers. And we had twin marine boilers there that--we would shut one down; we always had one active to keep steam up for the children and heat and food. But they were beginning to put a wing on, a new wing, for two and a half million dollars in 1958. And one of the counselors came from Newton, but he was also a teacher in Needham, and they were going to lay him off. And I said to him "We're gonna need

extra help here, we have to move file cabinets, desks, all kinds of furniture." And I said "Would you like to go a-laboring, it would pay a lot more money than a counselor." He said, "Oh, I'd love to do that." So I went to the director and they only wanted to pay him minimum counselor wages. I said "He's gotta get laborers' wages, it's hard work," and he did and we became good friends. And, turns out his profession was a teacher and he's teaching in Needham for 40 years. Actually he taught my present wife's grandchildren in Needham.

And I tell you how--the first time--after I got him the job, I had four or five station wagons I maintained, belonged to The Home for Little Wanderers. And we're sitting in one of the wagons, and it was Friday, and I took a bite out of my sandwich and I spit it out. He said, "What's the matter?" I says, "Friday." He said, "What?" He said, "Here, try some of mine." And I took his sandwich, I took a bite out of it, and I spit that one out. He said, "What's the matter with you?" He said, "My mother made that this morning. It's fresh." I said, "I said, today is Friday and I'm Roman Catholic." He said, "Oh. Well," he said, "I'm Protestant. I'm a Congregationalist." I says, "Okay." So, he said, "Well, what's wrong with Friday?" I said, "It's a sin for me to eat meat on Friday." I said, "We have two kinds of sins, mortal and venial." He says, "Would you say wasting food is a mortal sin?" And I said, "Oh yeah." He said, "So you don't want to come in tomorrow and sin so, why don't you finish the sandwich." And I said, "Gee, I never thought of that." And the first time ever I heard Henry Hank Genaske laugh, and he had a contagious laugh.

Actually, my present surgeon doctor has the same type of laugh, and I do tell him a joke once in a while just to hear him laugh. We became good friends. He had a friend that was also a teacher that used to teach in Wayland. And they were friends since they were 5 years old and both teachers, one in Wayland and one in Needham.

**Q:** What was it like when you first arrived to your new home, like in Newton?

**A:** In Newton?

**Q:** Mm-hmm.

**A:** My introduction to Newton was in the winter, and before I moved to Newton I had my days of wine and roses. And when I seen where I lived--after the grace of God had entered my life and I went into a program--I said to my wife, "How long have we lived here?" She said, "Six years." I says, "You gotta be kidding." She said--it started as--we got the first snowfall, and she said, "I want to show you the children's room." And the snow was coming through. The frames were rotted and the snow was coming through from outside, piling up on the window sill. And I was brokenhearted at what I'd seen.

Because I had missed the sea so much I started to drink a little more, and a little more. And Hank Genaske used to follow me around--a Newton kid--and try to get me to go home. Now I see where I live and I said "I'll have you out of here in the springtime." As a matter of fact, I went down and I got plaster of Paris. I was troweling up the window frames and the neighbor across the street in a three-decker thought I was putting up Christmas decorations. But anyhow, Hank invited me to Newton because he wanted his parents to meet with me. And in Jamaica Plain they never plowed the streets. I went to Newton, the streets were all plowed, the sidewalks were plowed. I'm looking, I was in another world. I said, "Wow, look at this place!" You know, you could see the sidewalks, the roads were all done and nice homes, and I'm in awe. And when I came home I said to my wife, "We're gonna move to Newton." She said, "You know who lives in Newton?" She said, "The lawyers and doctors, professional people." I said, "I don't care about that, we're going to move to Newton." And strange as it was--I owed a lot of money to the loan sharks and bad people, leg breakers. So, what are we gonna do? So I went down to the Coast Guard and I got--for two days I had to take command of a boat, for two days I had oral and written exams and I got my American license. And it was the proudest day of my life.

Now Hank Genaske of Newton said, "What are you going to do with that license?" I said, "I'm going away to sea. I can make \$100,000 on a six months trip and I can pay off my debts." And he was brokenhearted, and he told his parents about it, and they said, "We want to meet him." And when they met me they said, "Would you maintain the Congregational Church for us? We need a good maintenance man. Hank hates to see you go away to sea." And for 12 years I maintained it. And from there I built up Conneely Painting. I had another company, home and industrial maintenance, and we did yacht repair work in the shipyards. And I bought a beautiful home in West Newton, and my dream came true.

**Q:** That's great. What--was it difficult transitioning from Ireland to the U.S.?

**A:** To which?

**Q:** To the U.S., like transitioning?

**A:** I didn't--I was more at home in the United States than I ever was in Britain. I could understand people when they spoke, where in Britain...While I think of it, the purest English in the English-speaking world is spoken in Dublin, Ireland, not in England, and that's a fact. It's in the Guinness Book of Records.

**Q:** Can you describe someone--some of the cultural differences you've noticed between Ireland and the United States?

**A:** I couldn't see any difference except they drove on the other side of the road.

**Q:** Can you, is there anything else that you could elaborate more on, like, if there's any cultural differences between the people, maybe?

**A:** I found that the Bostonians were aloof, actually almost snobbish. And the first time I went on a streetcar--I never seen a streetcar by the way until I came to Boston--I stood up to let a lady get--have the seat I was at, and she went up one side of me and down the other and she told me she wasn't a cripple and how dare I. And my girlfriend, would became my wife, my Irish wife, said "You're not in Ireland now." And I would say good morning to somebody in Boston and they looked at you like they smelled something bad. And I found Bostonians very aloof and not very friendly to people. Unless they knew who you were, you were kind of treated with suspicion, kind of, especially if you had an Irish accent.

**Q:** Are there any similarities you've notice between Ireland and the United States?

**A:** Yes. You have the rivers. My hometown had five bridges across it. I found Boston had several bridges across the Charles. The islands, Galway Bay had its islands, the lighthouses. Everything was very similar.

**Q:** Can you describe any traditions you have started or held onto since moving here?

**A:** Which?

**Q:** Like any traditions that maybe you've started since moving here?

**A:** Traditions?

**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** Halloween came from Ireland. You didn't start that one, so I was quite, you know, comfortable with that. Thanksgiving...Because of the terrible things was happening in the north of Ireland to my countrymen, the British government had two and a half million Roman

Catholics squeezed into one corner. If you were Roman Catholic, you couldn't have a civil service job, you couldn't belong to a gun club, you couldn't own property in the Protestant areas, you couldn't work where the Titanic was built, in that shipyard. All these restrictions. I found...I never liked bullies and to me the British government were bullies. What they did--they brought in all the Scots English into the north of Ireland, repossessed the Irish--the native Irish--took their lands or farms away and gave it to the Scots and the English, and said "Hold this ground with a crown." And they happened to be non-Catholics. And this is where you had the Protestant and Catholic head to head. And I see this and I print the British [00:17:04] when they took my Merchant Marine license because it was issued by the Irish Ministry of Transport. They wouldn't let me get back on my ship, they chose a Scottish motor ship. And my skipper, who was a Scot, said "I'm not leaving you on the beach, lad. They won't beat you up, they will kill you, and I wouldn't have that on my conscience." And it was a dangerous place for a young merchant mariner in those years.

**Q:** Would you mind sharing a story of your first experience--well, you already speak English, but did you also speak Irish? Do you speak Irish as well?

**A:** I have what they call, "School Irish". But there's four dialects. There's four provinces in Ireland, and each Celtic language was a little variance, like with the Scots on the islands and the Hebrides. I could converse with the Scottish merchant mariners. And there was a favorite word that they use when things weren't going right and was *diabhal*. And *diabhal* is like the Spanish word devil, *diablo*. So, all you'd hear was "Diabhal, diabhal!" When things weren't going right...[laughter].

The Irish language, as I say, it was like--we never used it when we came over outside of school, because everything--everyone spoke English, maybe with different accents, but they spoke English. And...like the Scots would say, if they didn't understand something, just say, "I dinnae ken." I dinnae ken means, "I don't know," but you had to get into the native vocabulary, and you learned a lot through that. Even some of the Irish, some words, like, I didn't understand, but they had their own...Like in the fishing village of the Claddagh where I come from--that's not a ring. They had the wrong lingo. They never said, "They cut their hand," they "Reefs their hands." They weren't "sick," they were "laid up." They didn't say, "Who hit you?" It was, "Who hot you?" And, it wasn't a "door," it was a "dewr." Right. So they had their own, you know, kind of dialect.

**Q:** What were your hopes for yourself when you came here? Did you, like, live any of your hopes out, I guess, when coming to the U.S.?

**A:** The reason I came to the United States is my girl had--I had talked her into coming to the United States. Her people were famine people that got wrecked on Nantucket Shoals in the 1840's. They married into whaling people who were Quakers. To this day, they still own the island fish market in Nantucket, their family. And through the association--I wanted to go to Nantucket, and she wrote to me and when I come to Nantucket and Boston and...I said I'd go for a year, and I did. And I got married, but I wasn't happy and I went back to Ireland in 1956 and I brought my youngest daughter with me, at the time, my first daughter. And I was torn between my love for the sea and my love for my wife, Winnie, and I came back to the 'States, but that's when I entered the fog of alcoholism.

**Q:** What was your idea of America or Newton? Was it--was it like the same or has it changed?



**A:** What I was amazed at when I landed in the fall of 1953 was the blue skies. All I could see was blue. Where I came from, an island, it was cloud covered. You could look distance and I loved that, that...and the trees. Especially in Newton, I was amazed at what I was looking at.

**Q:** What was the most important and meaningful event you've experienced in your life?

**A:** The most important experience? In the United States?

**Q:** Just in your lifetime.

**A:** In what?

**Q:** In your life.

**A:** My daughter went to school in Newton, all of my family went to school in Newton, and she came home from school one day and she said, "Dad, I got to do a paper for the Newton schools on what was called the 'Storm of the Century.'" I said, "January 31st, 1953." She said, "Dad, how did you know that?" I said, "I was in it, three days adrift in the North Sea."

We lost all power, all points missing, all radio communication. We'd lost all our power. The seas were cleared or mastered at 80 feet. We drifted into the old Dutch minefields. We'd try to get our lifeboats in the water with the old round bar-type davits that swing out like this, like two arms. The seas had bent the steel. Round bar davits that you wouldn't believe, like they were spaghetti. We couldn't get our lifeboats in the water. The skipper and the chief engineer got into it, and the chief engineer went out and he got extra time. On the third day of that night, my skipper said to me, "Patrick, we got to get down those electric lights. We have no power. Could you run up the kerosene ones?" I had to look forward 500 feet. The ship is all awash, and the scream of the winds.

I went to see "The Perfect Storm," and when I came out of there my wife said, "What do you think?" I said, "Hollywood screwed up." She said, "What do you mean?" I said, "They didn't have the sound of the wind and the rigging like I really heard it." I said, "It was like people crying in the winds, moaning, *oooohhh*, terrible sounds, and sounds like drums beating, or freight trains running crazy." And now I'm asked to go up to the forepeak. And the young kid from the Scottish Hebrides said, "Patrick, you're not going alone. I'm going with you." So we had a plan. We would run through a storm lashing across our hatches, ten feet, on to the next ten feet. Hang on, take a deep breath, and we worked our way all the way to the forepeak. We got up there. The lamps were all ready to go. There was matches there, you lighted in the shelter of the forepeak. And we couldn't get down the electric ones, the hazards were all wound up tight. So here we are, soon enough to be washed overboard, and I looked towards the bridge, where I could see it, and I see the chief mate with the megaphone, trying to hang onto the megaphone. We couldn't hear what he was saying. And then, I felt a pulsation under my feet. And I looked at Mac and I said, "I think the [00:26:12] are gone!" I could feel motion. And she swung into it, and a waterfall came at both of us. We were both ass over teakettle [00:26:24]. And we were several weeks in dry dock with all the damage done to that ship, but we survived.

**Q:** What is your sweetest childhood memory?

**A:** Pardon me? My hearing is a little off.

**Q:** What was your sweetest childhood memory, like, if you have one?

**A:** My?

**Q:** Childhood memory.

A: So I don't remember, we're going back a ways now. I don't know if I ever was a child because when I went to sea I was ten years old. I'm trying think, as a child...

As I said, I was born on the docks and I had a harness on. The reason I had a harness was that I was tied to a gas light--there was no electricity, it was all gas lights--and I was tied to the light pole because I was falling into the harbor all the time. Or I used to get in among the cattle. [00:27:34] and I was covered from my head to toe with sweet violets. And I had a skirt on. They kept a skirt on you till you were seven or eight years old. And I had this harness, and my dad was a marine engineer, and people would come to our home. We're right on the harbor. Coming into the harbor, our house would be the first boat you would see, or the first house you would see. So people would come and have some problems with their engines, and he stepped out, he's babysitting with me.

I, at four years old, was looking for a ball underneath my bed, and the newspaper flared up and it shot into the tea chest, which was coal in there. The tea chest was on fire. The house was called a Yankee house because all made of wood. And on one end of it, they kept lifeboats and seals, tires, oil, paints. Everything went up. My dad tried to get me, the fire department was right there, and they pulled on my rope harness, and they pulled me out of there. Right? And nobody would believe me that I was the one that set the house on fire to this day.

But then we had to move to the Claddagh fishing village, and we weren't welcome there, because we were trawler people and they were like Amish people. They had their own king, their own rules. The police never went in there. They married into one another. And they were brutal to us.

But my real fond memories was going out in the dory to the big trawler, and going down and finding condensed milk, which I liked, and stuff like that. But...that were my memories.

**Q:** What has your experience living in the United States been like? You've already kind of answered this, but if there's anything that's a little bit different living here than in Ireland at all, I guess.

**A:** I actually didn't find any difference when we lived in the United States. The weather I loved. The seasons here. In Ireland, you had continuous showers, limited sunshine, like I said, clouds. But I found the air different. I thought I was going to smother because I was used to salt air, and I wasn't getting it. Actually, eighteen years ago I moved to Plymouth and the first thing I noted was the air quality was better than in Newton. And even my wife, a Newton girl, said, she said, "You're right, the air is better." And it is.

**Q:** Can you think of any common values or beliefs, or your practices, that would help people understand, like, the culture in Ireland? Anything, like you--of common value, of value maybe?

**A:** I think common values was family. We all sat down and had dinner together. There was more communication, verbally. There was no interruptions with TV at the time, or radio. And I felt that the families were closer together. And respect. Your children were taught to open the door for the elderly, or help somebody, to say please, thank you, excuse me. All these values in those days were handed down from family to family. Respect was the main thing, especially for the elderly.

**Q:** What advice would you give to somebody moving from Ireland to the United States?

**A:** I would tell them don't move with the idea that you're going to live there right away. I would say spend at least six months to a year in the United States, feel your way through, don't make any decisions, then you spend some time in these United States.

**Q:** Is there anything that we haven't covered that you would like to share with us?

A: I haven't covered? I want to say this. When I met Hank Genaske and his friend Timmy Kinchla, both teachers, they spoke a lot about education. And Hank used to laugh because sometimes my spelling was different than his. I would say "proh-gress" and he would say "prah-gress." We'd get into that bit, pronunciation. Anyhow, they spoke a lot about education and I wanted my children to have the best education, and the best education, I found out from both Hank, and other people, and Timmy Kinsler, was right here in Newton. And I wanted my children to have the best education.

My sisters in Ireland got a great education. One of them became the Vicaress General in Rome, the highest you can go in the nunnery. The other one was a Franciscan nun and squeezed the right poems through, because the Conneely's came from generations of poets.

But Hank Genaske opened my eyes, and the importance of education. And Newton was one of the best, if not the best in the United States for education and safety--crime was low. And I wanted my children to have the best education that they could get, and they got it. My oldest girl became a social worker and an investigator for the state, of abused children. I'd seen where she had to go because my stern man didn't show up in East Boston, and I had to go in the projects looking for him. And it's five o'clock in the morning and I could smell booze from the hallways and smoke. And I knew that was my oldest girl's beat, that was her area, part of her area. And I said "Mary should have a gun," going in these dark hallways and everything. She was a pretty girl. And I said it to her, and she said, "Dad, they would shoot me with the gun. But," she said, "they know who I am, and they're not--don't want to miss their welfare check" or whatever. And finally...she was very, very brave girl. Sadly, she died of cancer and is buried in Newton Cemetery, and so is my wife and my granddaughter.

And three years ago, my granddaughter OD'ed. And I had written "The Street of Regret." I had written a lot of poems, that dealt with drugs and alcohol. And she told me, she called me two

weeks before she died. She said, "Dadso," she said, "your poems gives me great comfort." And I had great feeling that she was going to be all right, because she had a problem. Instead of that, after that two weeks, they found her dead. She was dead three or four days before they found her body. And she was a beautiful girl, and she got in with the wrong crowd. I'm working currently with the Chief of Police in Pembroke because they have the problem there too. Actually, I dropped off a hundred poems of "The Street of Regret" which I had written, and just one.

And I wrote "The Street of Regret" for a young man that had a drug problem and a drinking problem. They followed a trail, at the yacht club, down to his sailboat. He had a beautiful sailboat. He was the joke of the yacht club, and the board directors wanted to throw him out of the yacht club, and we thought he should get help. And this morning, we followed that trail of blood. Everybody was afraid to go aboard the boat. What he did, he forgot his key, and he couldn't get in to the east end of the club where his boat was. So he climbed over razor wire and he got wrapped up in it, and, all of it. And he turned some more up his neck, his ears and his hands, and they were all afraid to go aboard his boat. And they asked, "Patrick, he always liked you. Would you go check on him?" I didn't know whether I was gonna find him living or dead. I found him in bad shape. I got him into a hospital. I got him into a program.

And sadly my home was wrecked in January, 1996. A giant oak tree came down, belonged to a neighbor, even though I asked him to limb it, he limbed his side, and all the weight was on my side. But the tree belonged to him. And it pushed by a living room house on this foundation. It cracked the street in five places. And strangely, that morning my wife said--she was just had been operated on for cancer, and she had to go back into the hospital--and she said, "That tree gives me the creeps." That night, I'm the only one in the house and the giant oak tree, winds 90 mile-an-hour from the south, came down, and my house was condemned by the City of Newton.

And my wife died and never came into that house again. And before she died, she said to me, "Would you write me something? You're always writing for people." She said, "The oncologist

told me I've only got four to six weeks to live. Could you write me something?" I said, "Let me think about it." I thought about the little boy going to sea, who is myself. I thought at the time that I always said, "So long for now, Winnie." I never said goodbye, it was always, "So long for now." I thought of all of this and I put it together and I called him "The Sailor Boy." I put my own music to it. I used to sing tenor in the choir. I sang it in a studio. We put the sound of the wind and the ocean on the background. And I brought it in to Brigham and Women's Hospital, and she learned to sing it, and she sang it every night before she went into a coma. The night nurse told me "Every night she sings that song." And if I'd never did anything the rest of my life I was able to give her that much. Would you like me to recite it for you?

**Q:** Yes, if you'd like to. Yes, please.

**A:** I was born the son of a seafaring man

and was destined to follow the sea.

At night, as I lay on my pillow

the wind, it so whispered to me:

"Go to sleep little lad, go to sleep

and dream of tall ships and the tide.

For soon you must go where the stormy winds blow

and the sea you will take for your bride."

So I sailed far away from old Galway Bay, south to Cape Horn and Peru

where we weathered some gales and we heard some tall tales from Galway to Fu Manchu.

Now he becomes an old man and the wind is whispering to him,

how the years they have fled since the sea I have wed.

And the wind softly whispers to me:

"Go to sleep old man, go to sleep

and dream of that distant shore

Where your days are all true, sailing on the blue

with shipmates forever more."

And that's "The Sailor Boy."

**Q:** That's amazing. Thank you so much. It looks like our time is just about up. What is one more thing you would like people a hundred years from now to know about the time in your service, in the service?

**A:** In the service?

**Q:** Yeah, or just in general, really, in your lifetime.

**A:** What I feel, and I was asked this before: what would you like your legacy to be? I said "I'd like to be remembered for bringing joy and comfort to people, and to mankind, through my poems."

**Q:** Thank you. Thank you so much for taking the time to do this with us. We're really happy to be able to include you in Newton Talks Oral History Project.

END OF INTERVIEW